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THE ANTARCTIC CONTINENT.

OFFICIAL REPORT OF LIEUTENANT WILKES.

U. S. S. VINCENNES, }
March 10, 1840. }

SIR—I have the honor to report, that having completed our outfits and observations at Sydney, New South Wales, the exploring squadron under my command, composed of this ship, the Peacock, Porpoise, and Flying Fish, sailed in company on the 24th of December, with my instructions to proceed south as far as practicable, and cruise within the Antarctic Ocean. Copies of the instructions were forwarded to you with my despatch No.

We continued in company until the 1st of January, when we parted company with the Flying Fish and with the Peacock, in a fog on the 3rd.

I then steered with the Porpoise in company for our first rendezvous, Macquarie Island, and thence to Emerald Island, our second rendezvous, having passed over the supposed locality of the land, in longitude 162 30 E. latitude 57 15 S. without seeing land or meeting with the Peacock or Flying Fish.

On the 10th of January, being in latitude 61 S. we fell in with the first icebergs, and continued steering to the southward among the icebergs, which compelled us to change our course frequently in avoiding them.

On the 12th, we ran into a bay of field ice in long. 164 53 E. and lat. 64 11 S. presenting a perfect barrier, to our progress further south, a heavy fog ensuing, during which we parted company with the Porpoise, her commander having direction to follow my written instructions in that event.

I had determined to leave each vessel to act independently, believing it would tend to give a greater degree of emulation to us all; and being well satisfied that, owing to the ice and thick weather, it would be impossible to continue long in company, I deemed it preferable to hazard the event of accident rather than embarrass our operations.

I therefore submit the details of the proceedings of this ship, as they will, without doubt, nearly coincide with the movements of the other vessels of the squadron, the reports from which will tend to verify our operations.

After an unsuccessful attempt to penetrate through the ice on the 12th of January, we proceeded to the westward, working along with head winds and fogs, and on the 16th we fell in with the Peacock, in long. 157 43 E. lat. 65 26 S.

On the morning of the 19th of January we saw land to the south and east, with many indications of being in its vicinity, such as penguin, seal, and the discoloration of the water; but the impenetrable barrier of ice prevented our nearer approach to it, and the same day we again parted the Peacock to the south and west. We were in long. 104 24 E. and lat. 66 30 S.

On the 22nd we fell in with large clusters and bodies of ice, and innumerable islands, and until the 29th were in a large bay formed by ice, examining the different points in hopes of effecting an entrance to the south, but were disappointed. We here reached lat. 67 4

long. 147 30 E. being the farthest south we penetrated. Appearances of distant land were seen in the eastward and westward, but all points except the one we entered presented an impenetrable barrier. We here filled our water tanks with ice-water taken from an iceberg alongside the ship.

We made our magnetic observations on the ice. The dipping needles gave 87 deg. 30 min. for the dip, and our azimuth compass was so sluggish on the ice, that on being agitated and bearings taken again, it gave nearly three points difference, the variations being 12 deg. 45 min. E. A few days afterwards, about 100 miles further to the west, we had no variation, and thence it rapidly increased in westerly variation, from which I am of opinion, that when in the ice bay we could not have been very far from the south magnetic pole. This bay I named Disappointment Bay, as it seemed to put an end to all our hopes of further progress south.

On the 27th we fell in with the Porpoise, in long. 142 20 E. and lat. 65 54 S. and parted company shortly afterwards.

On the 28th, at noon, after 13 repulses, we reached long. 140 30 E. and lat. 66 33 S. where we again discovered land bearing south, having run over 40 miles thickly studded with icebergs.

The same evening we had a heavy gale from the south-east, with snow, hail, and thick weather, which rendered our situation very dangerous, and compelled us to retrace our steps by the route which we had entered. During this gale we were unable to see the distance of a fourth of a mile, and the constantly passing icebergs that surrounded us, rendering it necessary to keep all hands on deck. On the morning of the 30th the gale abated, and we returned by the same route to reach the land, when the dangers we encountered among the ice the preceding night, and our providential escape, were evident to all.

We ran towards the land about fifty miles, when we reached a small bay, pointed by high ice cliffs, and black volcanic rocks, with about 60 miles of coast in sight, extending to a great distance towards the southward, in high mountainous land.

The breeze freshened to a strong gale, which prevented our landing, and compelled us to run out after sounding in 30 fathoms water; and within two hours afterwards the ship was again reduced to her storm sails, with a heavy gale from the southward, with snow, sleet, and a heavy sea, continuing 36 hours, and, if possible, more dangerous than that of the 28th and 29th, owing to the large number of ice islands around us; after which I received reports from the medical officers, representing the exhausted state of the crew and condition of the ship, of which the following are extracts:—

The medical officers on duty reported, under date of the 31st of January, that "the number upon the sick list this morning is 15; most of these cases are consequent upon the extreme hardship and exposure they have undergone during the last gales of wind, when the ship has been surrounded with ice. This number is not large, but it is necessary to state that the general health of the crew is, in our opin-

ion, decidedly affected, and that, under ordinary circumstances the list would be much increased, while the men, under present exigences, actuated by a laudable desire to do their duty to the last, refrain from presenting themselves as applicants for the list. Under these circumstances, we feel ourselves obliged to report that, in our opinion, a few days more of such exposure as they have already undergone, would reduce the number of the crew by sickness to such an extent as to hazard the safety of the ship and the lives of all on board."

After which, the surgeon being restored to duty, reported to me as follows:—

"I respectfully report, that in my opinion, the health of the crew is materially affected by the severe fatigue, want of sleep, and exposure to the weather, to which they have lately been subjected; that a continuance of these hardships, even for a very short period, will entirely disqualify a great number of men for their duty; and that the necessary attention to the health of the crew and their future efficiency and usefulness demands the immediate return of the ship to a milder climate."

Deeming it my duty, however, to persevere, I decided to continue, and steered again for the land, which we had named the Antarctic Continent.

We reached it on the 2nd of February, about 60 miles to the westward of the point first visited, where we found the coast lined with solid perpendicular cliffs, preventing the possibility of landing, and the same mountains trending to the westward. Thence we proceeded to the westward along the ice barrier, which appeared to make from the land, until the 3rd, when we again encountered a severe gale from the south-east, with thick weather and snow until the 7th of February, when it cleared up sufficiently to allow us to see our way clear, and we again approached the perpendicular barrier of ice, similar to that which we had previously seen as attached to the land, the same land being in sight at a great distance. We stood along the barrier about 70 miles to the westward, when it suddenly trended to the southward, and our further progress to the south was arrested by a solid barrier of field ice. After an unsuccessful examination for 24 hours in all directions, we continued to the westward along the barrier, as usual, surrounded by ice islands.

On the 8th and 13th (being on the 8th in long. 127 deg. 7 min. east, lat. 55 deg. 3 min. south) we had similar appearances of distant mountains, but the compact barrier extending from east to west by south, prevented a nearer approach.

On the night of the 9th of February, being the first clear night for some time, we witnessed the aurora australis.

We continued on the 10th and 11th westward, with south-east winds and fine weather, close along the barrier, which was more compact, with immense islands of ice enclosed within the field ice.

On the 12th we again saw the distant mountains, but were unable to effect a nearer approach, being in long. 112 16 E. lat. 64 57 S. and I was again compelled to go on to the westward.

The ice barrier trending more to the southward, induced me to hope I should again succeed in approaching nearer the

supposed line of coast. On the 13th, at noon, we had reached long. 107 45 E. lat. 65 11 S. with a tolerable clear sea before us, and the land plainly in sight. I continued pushing through the ice until we stopped by the fixed barrier about 15 miles from the shore, and with little or no prospect of effecting a landing.

I hauled off for a short height, and the next morning made another attempt at a different point, but was equally unsuccessful, being able to approach only three or four miles nearer, as it appeared perfectly impenetrable. Near us were several icebergs, colored and stained with earth, on one of which we landed, and obtained numerous specimens of sand, stone, quartz, conglomerate and sand, some 100lb. This, I am well satisfied, gave us more specimens than could have been obtained from the land itself, as we should no doubt have found it covered with the ice and snow 100 or more feet in thickness. We obtained a supply of fresh water from a pond in the same island. Our position was long. 106 40 E. lat. 65 37 S. and upwards of 70 miles of coast in sight, trending the same as that we had previously seen.

Although I had now reached the position where our examinations were to terminate by my instructions to the squadron, I concluded to proceed to the westward along the barrier, which continued to be much discolored by earth, and specimens of rock, &c. were obtained from an ice island. A sea leopard was seen on the ice, but the boats did not succeed in taking him.

On the 17th of February, in long. 97 30 E. lat. 64 S. land was again seen at a great distance towards the south-west. We now found ourselves closely embayed and unable to proceed in a westerly direction; the ice barrier trending round to the northward and eastward, compelled us to retrace our steps. We had entered a deep gulf on its southern side, and it required four days' beating along its northern shore to get out of it. During the time our position was critical, the weather changeable, and little room in case of bad weather. It fortunately held up until we found ourselves again with a clear sea to northward.

The ice barrier had now trended to about 62 degrees of latitude; the wind having set in from the westward with dark weather and little prospect of seeing the land or of making much progress to the westward prior to the 1st of March, thereby losing time which might be spent to advantage for our whaling interests at New Zealand, I determined to proceed to the north on the evening of the 21st.

There was a brilliant appearance of the aurora australis on the 17th of February, in long. 97 39 E. lat. 64 S.; also on the 22nd in long. 103 30 E. lat. 58 10 S.; on the 25th in long. 117 31 E. lat. 53 S.; and on the 1st March in long. 137 E. lat. 49 30 S.

The result stated in this report leads me to the following conclusions:—

1st. From our discoveries of the land through 40 degrees of longitude, and the observations made during this interesting cruise, with the similarity of formation and position of the ice during our close examination of it, I consider that there can scarcely be a doubt of the existence of the Antarctic continent extending the